

Address of the Secretary General, Press Brunch 9 February 2012, Brussels

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, Invited guests, colleagues and friends. I am delighted to welcome you all to ACP House, or, as we say where I come from, *Akwaaba!* The fact that you have been able to honour our invitation this morning shows not only your level of interest in the work that we do here but also in the ideals of solidarity and cooperation which inform our longstanding relations with Europe. We believe it crucially important that we continually engage with the media so as to keep the public well-informed about the ACP, its activities, achievements and challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, nobody is better placed than you to help us spread the message of hope, peace and international social justice that the ACP family of nations symbolises. As one American civil rights leader put it, "**The people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the press.**" This is only the first in many more events of this kind that we will be hosting from time to time.

Friends and colleagues, the ACP was founded under the Georgetown Agreement of 1975 as an inter-governmental body committed to North-South cooperation for development. Today, we have 79 members from three diverse regions, with a combined population of **980 million**. They range from Cuba in the Caribbean to Vanuatu in the Pacific; from the beautiful islands of Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean to South Africa and Cape Verde. We have as members 40 out of 48 of the world's Least Developed Countries and 36 Small Island Developing States. With the eventual accession of the new Republic of South Sudan, our membership will attain the rounded figure of eighty.

Your Excellencies, the enduring strength of the ACP derives from our common experiences as developing states, along with decades of international trade negotiations, development finance cooperation and the dialogue of civilisations. The unique character of our longstanding partnership with Europe is grounded on the contractual approach to international development and a clear vision of mutually shared obligations and responsibilities. Our approach to political dialogue under the Cotonou Agreement allows us to speak frankly and openly with each other on how to improve good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Through North-South cooperation and South-South collective action, we seek effective ways by which to alleviate poverty while successfully integrate our nations into the world trading system.

The Changing Global Context

Ladies and gentlemen, the second decade of the 21st century greets us with new opportunities as well as challenges. From the emergence of The BRICS to the upheavals in the Maghrib that came to be known as the 'Arab Spring'. Across the emerging world, there is greater demand for liberty and for the widening of the democratic space even as livelihoods are threatened and well-educated youths face the prospects of long-term joblessness. Poverty remains a challenge for the bulk of our people, in addition to the nightmare of Climate Change. There is also the changing institutional architecture of the New Europe, a phenomenon that has raised several critical questions about the future of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership after 2020.

We are equally concerned about the continuing fiscal challenges facing some of our European friends, particularly Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. I need not emphasise that a prosperous Europe is in everybody's long-term interest. Being the world's largest economic space and the biggest trading bloc, recovery in the EU is critical to the restoration of the global economic equilibrium and to the long-term sustainable development of the poorest nations.

As the world slowly recovers from the global financial crisis, the axis of power is also shifting from the West, and new and robust emerging economies present exciting potential for partnerships, as well as new complexities for ACP countries. China, for example, is becoming a dominant trading and investment partner for Africa.

All these changes provide new opportunities as well as challenges that will require all the imagination and sagacity of our leaders to steer our nations in a manner that protect their liberties while expanding economic opportunities for the vast majority.

Year 2011

Excellencies, I had occasion to describe 2011 as the 'Year of Consolidation'. I am pleased to report a number of significant achievements and milestones. Our ongoing political dialogue with the EU and our co-management of EDF resources has continued to register significant improvements. We have also made some inroads in the renewed drive towards South-South solidarity. In February 2011, for instance, the ACP Secretariat in partnership with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) held the first ever symposium on South-South relations between the ACP and IBSA states – India, Brazil and South Africa. This led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat and Brazil in December 2011 to promote technical cooperation and dialogue between the parties.

In the same vein, we entered into MOUs with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the IMF, UNDP, ITC, IOM, and the World Customs Organisation, while longstanding relations with bodies such as La Francophonie, the Commonwealth, and think tanks such as the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) continue to grow from strength to strength. With our partners at the African Union, we have also created the Inter-Regional Organisations Coordination Committee (ACP-IROCC) to ensure more synergy between the different ACP regional economic communities.

I am happy to also report that, in September 2011, during its 42nd Session of Heads of State and Government in Auckland, New Zealand, the ACP was admitted as an Observer to the Pacific Islands Forum. We have also participated in key meetings such as COP17 in Durban, the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan and the 8th WTO Trade Ministerial, with united positions as a Group on essential subjects on the development debate. Internally, we have also embarked upon the long overdue institutional reforms to reposition the Secretariat as an international development organisation.

Year 2012 Work Programme

Going forward, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to declare 2012 as our 'Year of Restoration'. Building on our consolidation, we will return to those values of leadership and commitment that are the hallmarks of excellence for an international organisation. Under my leadership, we will re-invent the ACP as a forward-looking international organisation that is a genuine partner to Europe and other international development stakeholders. We will work harder and also smarter to meet the demands and expectations of our Principal Organs. As this year unfolds, we are committed to the following:

Firstly, to deepen South-South solidarity and collaboration, amongst ACP states and regions, as well as other developing countries which share our goals of easing poverty situations, as well as the effective, fair and gradual integration of our nations into the world trade system.

I recently returned from the African Union Leaders' Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where the key focus was on strategies to boost Africa-wide trade for development, a theme that resonated with us here at ACP House. We are also keen to expand our dialogue with civil society over the coming months. The Cotonou Agreement includes a clause for the active engagement of civil society – whose organisations often transcend national and regional divides – in the ACP-EU framework, and this deserves renewed attention in 2012.

Secondly, we shall intensify our focus on the Millennium Development Goals, keeping in mind the recent World Bank Reports that show the dire effects of the global financial crisis on low-income developing countries such as ours. These efforts will include a focus on good governance, the rights of women and children, and the right to decent standards of living. Climate change and natural hazards have exacerbated the rates of poverty for some of our nations, putting the livelihoods of fragile communities in jeopardy and the life-chances of millions at risk. We need now, more than ever, consolidated efforts from our member states and partners to address these challenges.

Thirdly, we are committed to deepening the trade and development agenda in ways that will prove more sustainable for our communities. Looking towards the Rio20+ conference coming up in June, we will hold several consultations with key stakeholders so as to strengthen ACP collective voice on Climate Change, with a strong emphasis on issues such as job-creation, renewable energy, food security, water, disaster management and sustainable cities. The threat of famine in the Horn of Africa and the grim risk of ocean-level changes in the Pacific evoke very frightening scenarios that call for urgent action on a coordinated global scale.

Excellencies, we will also do all that we can to ensure finalisation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) negotiations. As you are probably aware, only the Caribbean has so far concluded its negotiations with the EU. This long drawn-out process is compounded by the fact that some of the Commission's requests – such as 80% liberalisation within 15 years and unilateral abolition of export taxes – are too demanding on the fragile fiscal bases of some of our countries, some of them among the poorest in the world. They also do not take into account the levels of development and regional specificities as well as vulnerabilities. We at the Secretariat are as anxious as anyone to bring the EPA process to a speedy and successful conclusion. We will therefore do our part to reach a settlement that is prudent, equitable and just.

Lastly, we hope to leverage on our moral capital as a global coalition to enhance the collective voice of the ACP in the international arena and reinvigorate its role as a player on global development issues. Since early 2011, an Ambassadorial Working Group on the Future of the ACP began its work to review and consolidate a direction beyond 2020. This saw the recruitment of Professor Mirjam van Reisen, *The Marga Klompé Endowed Chair* on International Social Responsibility at Tilburg University, the Netherlands. She also happens to be the founding-director of the research and consultancy group Europe External Policy Advisors (EEPA) based in Brussels. Her study on future options and scenarios will be an important input for the Working Group on the Future.

Development Finance and EDF Programming

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the EDF-10 financial cycle ends in 2013. As you would recall, it was a package of €22 billion spread over ten years. Discussions are ongoing on the successor EDF-11 financing cycle. Our European partners are proposing a figure €34.3 billion, to be spread over seven years to 2020. This is only an indicative figure, as it is subject to negotiations with EU member states. Coming at a time when Europe itself is facing an unprecedented financial crisis, it shows a commitment on Europe's part not to give up on its international responsibilities. In the coming months we shall be dialoguing with the Commission on performance of the current EDF and its finalisation even as we explore ways of improving the development effectiveness of the EDF-11.

Heads of State Summit

Gentlemen and women of the press, the ACP Council of Ministers took the decision late last year to hold the 7th ACP Heads of State Summit in 2012. The proposal from the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to host the event was accepted, and a tentative date for the Summit has been set for early December. A theme has yet to be set, although a task force has been appointed to mobilise preparations for this meeting. As the ACP has not had a Heads of State Summit since 2008, we will certainly have a lot to talk about. In the lead up to the Summit, we also have the major annual ACP-EU Joint Council of Ministers in the Pacific nation of Vanuatu in June, and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assemblies in Denmark this May and in Suriname in November.

Concluding Observations

Excellencies, colleagues and friends, in concluding these remarks, I want to leave you with a message of optimism. Towards the end of last year, the influential London-based magazine, *The Economist*, had a headline which described Africa as 'the hopeful continent'. It had on its front page the picture of a young lad with a rainbow coloured balloon that mounted high into the African sky. At a time when it is easy to give in to pessimism, Africa – and indeed the ACP -- symbolises a rainbow of hope.

Like any organisation, we have gone through mountain top experiences as well as down valley low points. It is remarkable that, through all the vicissitudes of time, no single member has ever renounced the fellowship and no country has ever expressed doubt about our solidarity and continuing relevance. More than ever, we are strengthened in our conviction that our future lies in our collective strength. I also believe that, if the ACP did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it. We are the symbol of hope in a cynical and divided world; standing as we do for those time-tested values of interdependence and solidarity without which humanity will have no future to speak of.

I thank you once again for coming and please enjoy your breakfast. On my own behalf and on behalf of the ACP Secretariat, I wish you all a prosperous and successful 2012.

H.E Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas
Secretary General
ACP Secretariat

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